

# How Does a Weary World Rejoice?

## We acknowledge our weariness.

First Sunday in Advent

Luke 1:1-12 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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In just four weeks, and throughout the month of December for that matter, we will focus on the coming of good news in the form of a baby born in Bethlehem, One who will change the course of history. This season of the year, which the church calls Advent – meaning “coming” or “arrival” – is a time of **anticipation, preparation, and active waiting**. It is meant to be **a time of rejoicing** as we reflect upon the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Yet, there's so much going on throughout the world today, certainly within our own nation, that is not a cause for celebration and rejoicing. Daily news has become traumatic. In the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, war and injustice, ongoing poverty and discrimination, it's often hard to find what can be considered “good news”. **For any number of reasons, many of us are entering this Advent with weary hearts, minds, and spirits.**

Guided, therefore, by this year's Advent resource material from A Sanctified Art, each week we will ask and reflect upon the question: **How does a weary world rejoice?** The question itself is helpful in that while it acknowledges our weariness, it also emphasizes the capacity and opportunity to find reasons to rejoice. Reflecting on the night of Jesus' birth, the magnificent song **O Holy Night**, includes the line in the first verse, **“A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices.”** When you think about it, was there ever a time in history when the world wasn't weary. Yet **in the midst of that weariness, the world has and can find ways to rejoice.** It is indeed possible to find moments of joy within each and every day. Too often, however, they are simply overlooked.

We learn, then, that we can experience more than one emotion at a time. For instance, both joy and grief. As an example, we can be profoundly sad at the loss of a loved one at a memorial service, but also celebrate the life and love experienced by and with that person. There can be moments of hope and joy even when we are anxious, excited, exhausted, disappointed, uncertain, or upset with circumstances in life, including the life of our nation and the world. From a spiritual standpoint, **we can always find a way to rejoice because our joy is rooted in the truth that we belong to God, and that God is with us – Emmanuel.**

**Hope and joy are transformative emotions. They can change our perspective and bring warmth to those around us.** We all deserve to feel joy, and the world needs our joy, even when we are weary. **The season of Advent reminds us to rejoice in a hope that is promised but not yet realized** in a world that feels like it is breaking apart. So how do we get there? **We can start by simply acknowledging our weariness and stop**

**pretending that everything is fine.** The Rev. Cecilia D. Armstrong, writing a commentary in the resource material, adds:

We can be weary in various ways. We can be weary because of our age. We can be weary because of our waiting. We can be weary because we have faced the same routine for years and seemingly watched nothing change. We can be weary for various reasons, but must we stay weary? **Can we exchange our weariness for hope?** Is there a way to experience weariness and insist on the blessed hope that is to come?

To address this, the Gospel reading selected for this First Sunday in Advent is the story in Luke of **the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth**. They have battled infertility and have lived long years steadfast in their faith. With their hopes and dreams of a child unattained, they must have been weary, perhaps even filled with grief. But an angel appears to Zechariah and announces in detail that even in old age, he and Elizabeth will bear a child. Zechariah, however, has a hard time receiving this good news, asking, **“How will I know that this is so?”** He basically asks: How can I be sure? This implies that he cannot fully accept what he has heard to be true. The story states that because he does not believe the angel's words, which will be fulfilled in their time, Zechariah will be unable to speak throughout the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy. We learn that the baby who is born will be named John and will later become John the Baptist, a relative of and forerunner of Jesus. Armstrong reflects:

Zechariah's question to [the angel] is directly aligned with this question of weariness and expectation of hope... **When we are weary, we tend to seek clarity instead of insisting on God's grace to provide for us during the weariness.** As a result, Zechariah is kept silent or muted.

**It seems that weariness brought on by unfulfilled expectations can fuel our inability to believe or offer us an opportunity to lose hope.** Given this possibility, our resource has paired this Gospel reading with **Psalm 80, a cry for restoration** because weariness has shaken the ability to hope. The request in the form of a prayer is to *restore* us, to let God's face shine. This request is made three times in the text. Anything that is repeated three times in any biblical passage can be interpreted as being very important to the author. Armstrong writes:

**Restoration** is important because amid weariness, there must be a light at the end of the tunnel. **There must be a way to combat the weariness of the current times.** There must be a glimpse of hope that helps to sustain us during the weary times and grants us the opportunity to rejoice.

There is a famous poem by Langston Hughes titled, “Mother to Son.” It was written in 1922 and appeared again in print in 1926 in Hughes's first book, *The Weary Blues*. The poem depicts the heaviness of living life as a Black person who faces the many obstacles and dangers that accompany racism in American society. What offers hope during the weariness is the encouragement to not turn back, to not sit down on the steps, and to keep climbin'. Armstrong adds, “This seems to be the encouragement we can find in Zechariah and Elizabeth's story. And for us, even if silent, don't turn back,

but **look ahead since restoration is coming.**" This is the good news gospel message of Advent.

Here's a good question to ask as we enter into this season of Advent: **What weariness do you carry – in your body and soul?** Like Zechariah, when have you (or I) been unwilling to believe in news that seems too good to be true? Though it may be difficult, **what does it look like for you to rejoice when you are weary?** When have you remained hopeful or welcomed joy while simultaneously feeling anxious, afraid, alone, sad, or overwhelmed?

In what can admittedly be a difficult time of year for many, perhaps yourself, it is my hope that we, as individuals and as a community of faith, can **hold a space for our weariness and our hope and joy.** It's yet another one of those both/and scenarios, rather than just either/or. So as in the phrase from *O Holy Night*, may we experience, "A thrill of hope [as] the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."

Amen.

Resource:  
A Sanctified Art, Advent 2023.